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PAGE 01 STATE 063379

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - MISSING PORTIONS PARA FIVE AND SIX

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TAGS: MARR, TH

SUBJECT: BRIEFING MEMO - THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN
THAILAND

REF: STATE 51248 (TOSEC 100)

FROM EA - P.C. HABIB

SUMMARY: A NEW THAI GOVERNMENT AND ITS POLICY STATEMENT
WERE APPROVED BY THE THAI PARLIAMENT MARCH 19. THE STATE-
MENT CALLS FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL U.S. FORCES IN
THAILAND WITHIN ONE YEAR. DOMESTIC POLITICAL EXIGENCIES

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SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 063379

AND THE GROWING CONVICTION THAT THE U.S. CAN NO LONGER BE

COUNTED UPON AS A SECURITY GUARANTOR PRODUCED THIS DEVELOPMENT. EVEN IF CAMBODIA SQUEAKS THROUGH, THE KIND OF SECURITY RELATIONSHIP WHICH USED TO PERMIT THE PRESENCE OF A LARGE U.S. COMBAT FORCE IN THAILAND WILL PROBABLY NO LONGER BE POSSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER MORE THAN SEVEN WEEKS OF LABOR FOLLOWING THE JANUARY 26 THAI ELECTIONS, THAILAND HAS A GOVERNMENT. ON MARCH 19 THE THAI PARLIAMENT GAVE PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT'S COALITION OF PRIMARILY CONSERVATIVE, MILITARY-SPONSORED PARTIES A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE BY THE RELATIVELY

NARROW MARGIN OF 140 TO 124 (135 CONSTITUTES AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY). KHUKRIT'S OLDER BROTHER, SENI, HAD FAILED THIS TEST TWO WEEKS EARLIER DESPITE A LAST-MINUTE EFFORT TO ATTRACT NATIONALIST AND LEFT-WING SUPPORT BY CALLING FOR THE COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES WITHIN 18 MONTHS (REFTEL).

2. WHILE U.S. FORCES PROBABLY ARE NOT AN ISSUE FOR THE MAJORITY OF THAI, MANY AMONG THE POLITICALLY AWARE AND ARTICULATE ELITE HAVE ALWAYS FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT A FOREIGN MILITARY PRESENCE ON THAI SOIL. A STRONG GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS THE FORMER MILITARY REGIME DURING ITS HEYDAY, MIGHT BE ABLE TO DISMISS NATIONALIST SENSITIVITIES IN THE INTEREST OF IMPORTANT POLICY OBJECTIVES. KHUKRIT'S COALITION, HOWEVER, HAS AN EXTREMELY TENUOUS MANDATE TO GOVERN. ONCE SENI MADE THE IDEA OF COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL RESPECTABLE BY INCLUDING IT IN HIS GOVERNMENT'S POLICY STATEMENT, IT BECAME NECESSARY FOR KHUKRIT TO PROMISE THE THAI PUBLIC AT LEAST AS MUCH AS HIS BROTHER HAD. NOT SURPRISINGLY, KHUKRIT'S POLICY STATEMENT, WHICH THE MARCH 19 VOTE IN PARLIAMENT FORMALLY APPROVED, CALLS FOR COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL FROM THAILAND OF FOREIGN TROOPS WITHIN ONE YEAR, THOUGH THERE ARE SOME LOOPHOLE CLAUSES.

3. CAMBODIA PRESENTS AN EVEN MORE DIFFICULT DILEMMA FOR THE THAI LEADERSHIP. THE KEYSTONE TO THAI FOREIGN POLICY SINCE THE 1950'S HAS BEEN RELIANCE ON THE U.S. AS A SECURITY GUARANTOR. CERTAINLY, SEVERAL CONSIDERATIONS, SECRET

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PAGE 03 STATE 063379

INCLUDING GENEROUS AMOUNTS OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE WHICH WERE VALUED PER SE BY THE FORMER MILITARY LEADERS, INFLUENCED THE THAI DECISION IN THE 1960'S TO ALLOW THE DEPLOYMENT OF A LARGE U.S. MILITARY FORCE TO THAILAND. EVEN AT THAT TIME, HOWEVER, CONFIDENCE IN THE U.S. SECURITY COMMITMENT TO THAILAND PROBABLY WEIGHED MORE HEAVILY THAN ANY OTHER FACTOR, AND THE DEPLOYMENT WAS REGARDED AS A LOGICAL EXTENSION OF THAILAND'S SECURITY

ALLIANCE WITH THE U.S.

4. TODAY, THAI CONFIDENCE IN THAT ALLIANCE IS CRUMBLING AS THE INDOCHINA SITUATION WORSENS AND IS LIKELY TO DIMINISH STILL FURTHER SHOULD PHNOM PENH FALL. THE EXACT MANNER OF CAMBODIAN COLLAPSE, SHOULD IT OCCUR, COULD MARGINALLY AFFECT THE THAI PERCEPTION OF THE DEGREE OF AMERICAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUCH AN EVENTUALITY, BUT EVEN UNDER THE BEST CIRCUMSTANCES -- CONGRESS GRANTS SUPPLEMENTAL AID AND THE KHMER SQUEAK THROUGH -- THE THAI WILL BE ABUNDANTLY AWARE OF THE UNPOPULARITY IN THE U.S. OF FURTHER SOUTHEAST ASIAN INVOLVEMENTS AND THEREFORE RELUCTANT TO EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO THE VAGARIES OF U.S. POLICY IN THE AREA. IN THIS REGARD, KHUKRIT TOLD THE PRESS MARCH 17 THAT THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA WOULD NOT AFFECT HIS WITHDRAWAL POLICY, BUT ON THE CONTRARY, "WITH THE FALL OF MARSHAL LON NOL'S GOVERNMENT BECOMING MORE IMMINENT, AMERICAN TROOPS WILL HAVE TO BE WITHDRAWN EVEN MORE URGENTLY." CLEARLY, OUR MILITARY PRESENCE IS INCREASINGLY SEEN AS NOT ONLY IRRELEVANT TO THE FIGHTING IN INDOCHINA, BUT EVEN AS A DISTINCT LIABILITY TO THE THAI IN THEIR EFFORTS TO FIND THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS THEY THINK THEY NEED IN THE ABSENCE OF A CREDIBLE U.S. SECURITY GUARANTEE.

5. IN OUR INITIAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE NEW THAI GOVERNMENT ON THE FUTURE OF OUR MILITARY PRESENCE WE WILL PROPOSE THE WITHDRAWAL PACKAGE AUTHORIZED BY NSDM 286 (A FORCE LEVEL OF 21,300 AS OF JUNE 30, 1975, AND 10,000 AS OF DECEMBER 31, 1976). HOWEVER, ANYTHING LESS THAN THE UNAVAILABLE OPTION OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN CAMBODIA (INCLUDING INCREASED MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THAILAND) IS LIKELY TO PROVE INSUFFICIENT TO CONVINCE THE

SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 063379

THAI SUCH A LARGE PRESENCE IS AN ASSET AND THUS NEUTRALIZE THE GROWING SENTIMENT FOR RAPID WITHDRAWAL. MOREOVER, THE PRIMARY PURPOSE TO BE SERVED BY KEEPING A SUBSTANTIAL COMBAT FORCE IN THAILAND THROUGH 1976--TO DETER NORTH VIETNAMESE AGGRESSION--HAS BEEN CALLED INTO QUESTION BY THAI DISAVOWAL OF THE PUBLIC POSITION THAT FORCE REDUCTIONS WOULD BE KEYED TO THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA. BOTH GOVERNMENTS HAD PREVIOUSLY ADHERED TO THIS POSITION.

6. IN THE THAI VIEW, THE COURSE OF EVENTS IN INDOCHINA CALLS FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN THE NATURE OF OUR SECURITY RELATIONSHIP.

AS THE SITUATION UNFOLDS IN INDOCHINA, AS THE

THAI POLITICAL SITUATION DEVELOPS, AND AS THE NATURE OF
THE FIRST ROUND OF TROOP LEVEL DISCUSSIONS BECOMES CLEAR,
WE WILL HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF JUST WHAT KIND OF PRESENCE
WE WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN IN THAILAND. INGERSOLL

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